Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006

Message Text

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PAGE 01 LONDON 06268 231739Z

41
ACTION EB-07

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: EGEN, ETRD, UK
SUBJECT: IMPACT OF METRIC SYSTEM ON U.S. EXPORTS

REF: (A) 75 STATE A-6689, (B) STATE 45813

1. TWO COPIES OF METRICATION BOARD'S ANNUAL REPORT FOR 1975 (GOING METRIC - PROGRESS IN 1975), TWO COPIES PROPOSED AMENDMENTS TO SECTION 10 (10) OF 1963 WEIGHTS AND MEASURES ACT AND COMPLETE FINANCIAL TIMES SPECIAL REPORT ON METRICATION PUBLISHED MARCH 24 WERE SENT TO FOREIGN BUSINESS PRACTICES DIVISION, COMMERCE, ATTENTION LIGHTMAN, APRIL 14. PUBLICATIONS OUTLINED CURRENT STATUS UK MOVES TOWARD METRICATION AND TEMPORARY BREAK PLACED ON PROGRESS BY POSTPONEMENT MARCH 23 OF SECOND READING OF CONTROVERSIAL WEIGHTS AND MEASURES BILL AMENDMENTS TO THIS BILL HAD BEEN INTRODUCED TO ENABLE UK TO MEET ITS COMMITMENT UNDER TREATY OF ACCESSION TO EEC TO ADOPT USE OF THE METRIC SYSTEM BY APRIL 1978, RESULTINQ IN PHASING OUT OF IMPERIAL UNITS, WITH CERTAIN EXCEPTIONS' BY END OF 1979. PRESSURE FOR POSTPONEMENT SECOND READING CAME FROM CONSERVATIVE OPPOSITION IN HOUSE OF COMMONS AND CONSUMER GROUPS. OPPONENTS FEAR THAT METRICATION WILL LEAD TO SAME KINDS OF HIDDEN PRICE RISES WHICH RESULTED FROM CONVERSION TO DECIMAL CURRENCY.

2. PROGRESS TOWARD METRICATION SINCE ITS INTRODUCTION IN 1965 HAS BEEN SLOW AND UNEVEN. BOTH INDUSTRY AND
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PAGE 02 LONDON 06268 231739Z

GOVERNMENT NOW FEEL THAT UNLESS MANDATORY CUTOFF DATES

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ON USE OF IMPERIAL MEASURES ARE INTRODUCED, THE NECES-
SARY PROGRESS TOWARD METRICATION WILL NOT BE MADE. SO
FAR GREATEST PROGRESS HAS BEEN MADE IN CONSTRUCTION IN-
DUSTRY (ALMOST 100 PERCENT METRIC) AND IN ENGINEERINQ
(ABOUT 58 PERCENT OF ALL ENGINEERING PRODUCTION IS NOW
METRIC AND ALMOST 90 PERCENT OF ENGINEERING DESIGN IS
METRIC). METRICATION BOARD AND GOVERNMENT SOURCES IN
DEPT OF PRICES AND CONSUMER PROTECTION ARE CONFIDENT THAT
AMENDMENTS TO WEIGHTS AND MEASURES BILL WILL HOWEVER BE
REINTRODUCED IN NEAR FUTURE, PARTICULARLY AS ADVERSE
IMPACT OF NON-METRICATION ON UK EXPORTS IS BECOMING
WIDELY UNDERSTOOD BY THE PUBLIC.

3. PRIMARY IMPACT OF METRICATION WILL NOT BE ON U.S.
TRADE WITH UK PER SE, BUT RATHER WITH U.S. TRADE WITH
EEC. METRICATION BOARD SOURCES INFORMED EMBASSY THAT
COMMUNITY DIRECTIVES ARE PRIMARY SOURCES OF INFORMATION
ON POSSIBLE IMPACT OF METRICATION ON U.S. EXPORTS. OF
MORE CONCERN IS PACKAGING LEGISLATION WHICH WILL REQUIRE
CONVERSION FROM STANDARD IMPERIAL TO METRIC SIZES.
THERE IS CORE GROUP OF 52 BASIC FOODSTUFFS WHICH ARE
DESCRIBED UNDER BRITISH LAW AS "PRESCRIBED QUANTITY
GOODS". U.S. EXPORTERS WISHING TO SELL THESE BASIC
FOODSTUFFS IN THE UK WILL HAVE TO ADJUST THEIR PACKAGING
TO THE METRIC STANDARDS WHICH WILL BE SET UP IN ACCORD-
ANCE WITH THE DIRECTIVES THAT WILL FLOW FROM THE NEW
WEIGHTS AND MEASURES BILL WHEN PASSED. THE DEPT OF
PRICES AND CONSUMER PROTECTION IS PROVIDING EMBASSY
WITH BACKGROUND MATERIALS ON PROPOSED PACKAGING
CHANGES WHICH WILL BE FORWARDED TO COMMERCE ON RECEIPT.

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Margaret P. Grafeld
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